

Tuesday, October 3, 2017

## Holland Tour

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It all started with a suggestion to ride East from Rotterdam to the Veluwe National Park, but fairly quickly turned into a five day tour of the more interesting parts of Holland, of which there are many. So six riders, Liz, Corinne, Andrew, Steve, Peter and Al were dropped by the bike trailer on a damp Monday morning near Stamford Bridge and set off through Pocklington and Beverley for Hull and the ferry to Rotterdam. The weather improved the closer we got to Hull and we arrived at the ferry in sunshine.

We started as soon as we could after reaching Rotterdam as we had a 60 mile ride to Utrecht ahead of us. But the weather was mostly fine and we passed through Gouda with its baroque Goudse Waag (Cheese-weighing House), arriving in Utrecht at rush-hour, which was a sight to behold. We've never seen so many cyclists in such densities moving at such speed all apparently mixed in with pedestrians. It seemed terrifying and yet there were no accidents, and everything moved smoothly.



The following day, we had a short ride of 38 miles to Arnhem. We passed over the sandy heaths to the west of Arnhem in glorious autumn sunshine and we had time to look around the Airborne Museum at the old Hartstein Hotel which was the British HQ during Operation Market Garden. A sobering experience, especially since we found that the pleasant cafe where we'd had lunch had been a casualty station where 600 wounded men were treated. We finished our visit by cycling down one of the few hills we found in Holland to the Rhine to see the bridge. We were also struck by the affection and respect that the Arnhem people had for the veterans of the battle, which is regularly commemorated.



The next day we had a ride of 70 miles and we passed through the woods and heaths of the Veluwe National Park and then a region of polders towards the IJsselmeer (the old Zuiderzee) which we crossed on a nineteen mile long dyke. Fortunately the winds were light and behind us so we crossed over easily and quickly. We stayed at the very attractive old fishing port of Enkhuizen.



Another longish day of 79 miles followed as we cycled towards Haarlem, avoiding Amsterdam, through the pretty old town of Alkmaar where we came across the weekly Cheese Market which apparently is very famous (.....no, me neither). Then cycling near the coast through a rolling region of woods and old dune systems, onto the ferry across the North Sea Canal, finally reaching Leiden in a sudden downpour, leaving us soaked and cold. Our mood wasn't improved when we found our hotel, which we'd reserved several weeks previously, had no record of our booking and consequently, insufficient rooms for us. But with the help of a sofa bed, a camping bed and a greatly reduced fee, we had a tolerable night, apart from the noise created by revellers, which went on till 4am. Leiden is jumping on a Friday night.



And, as if in a flash, the last day dawned. We'd planned an easy 35 miles from Leiden to Rotterdam, passing through Delft. Here, we stopped for lunch and climbed the tower of the Nieuwe Kerk (New Church). A long way up and absolutely vertiginous views from the top.



Delft to Rotterdam was a short ride of less than an hour. We crossed over Nieuwe Waterweg by small ferry, arrived at the terminal, boarded the ship, had a meal and spent the evening listening to the in-ship band. The bike trailer met us at Hull and we were glad to be carried back to Harrogate.



A great trip, about 350 miles, a bridge too far, lots of cheese, dykes, canals, porcelain, one puncture and a broken dinner plate. But most of all, the thing that makes Wheel Easy so enjoyable, was great company. Al D